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CURRENT COMMUNIST LABOR TACTICS: (II) THE WFTU LINE FOR WORK IN
RURAL AREAS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
A. INTRODUCTION	1
B. THE WORLD CONFERENCE OF AGRICULTURAL AND FORESTRY WORKERS . . .	1
1. Purpose	1
2. Preparatory Activities	2
3. Participation	2
4. Agenda	4
5. Resolutions	4
a. The Importance of Organization	5
b. Organizational Methods and Principles	5
c. Organization of United Action	6
d. Organizational Forms	7
e. Ways and Means of Organization	8
6. Results of the Program	9
7. Administrative Changes Made at the Conference	10
C. CONCLUSIONS	10

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CURRENT COMMUNIST LABOR TACTICS: (II) THE WFTU LINE FOR WORK IN
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A. Introduction

Immediately following the Third World Congress of the WFTU, the Trade Union International of Agricultural and Forestry Workers (a WFTU Trade Department) held a World Conference of Agricultural and Forestry Workers in Vienna, October 24-28, 1953. This conference was planned as an adjunct to the Third World Trade Union Congress; its ostensible purpose was to develop, on the basis of the conclusions of the earlier meeting, an action program for the improvement of the economic and social conditions of workers in agriculture and forestry.

This chapter is devoted to the events which transpired and the specific directives which were formulated at the Agricultural and Forestry Conference. These policies and programs of action have been designated by the WFTU as of utmost importance, because it is through the organization of the peasants and agricultural workers that the WFTU hopes to gain a foothold for Communism in the "colonial and underdeveloped areas." As has been shown in the chapter entitled "The General WFTU Line," these "colonial and semicolonial areas" of the world have become a primary target of the international Communist movement.

B. The World Conference of Agricultural and Forestry Workers

1. Purpose

This conference represents the first major step taken to organize the peasants and farmers in accordance with the WFTU policy regarding "colonial and semicolonial countries" announced at the Third WFTU Congress. Although this TUI has been in existence since December 1949, it has not been considered one of the major WFTU trade union federations. It has assumed importance only within the past 2 years, as the struggle between the Communist and non-Communist blocs for the allegiance of the "neutral" areas of the world has intensified.

Since 1951, the WFTU has devoted more and more of its resources to the extension of its influence over the labor movements of Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. At the same time, its influence over Latin America has been maintained by the Latin American Confederation of Labor (CTAL), under the direction of the WFTU Vice-President, Vicente Lombardo Toledano. These are the areas which the

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Communists call "colonial and semicolonial"--the areas where the agricultural and raw-material-production industries are the basis of the national economies and where heavy industry has not yet been developed as a major economic factor.

2. Preparatory Activities

The basic decision to hold the Agricultural and Forestry Workers Conference was made at the meeting of the WFTU Executive Bureau held in February 1953. More definite plans for the holding of the conference were then made at a meeting of the Administrative Committee of the TUI held in Vienna, July 27-28, 1953. Even before this July meeting, letters had been sent to labor leaders throughout the world informing them of the forthcoming conference, and propaganda publicizing the conference had been distributed.

Included in this material was "An Appeal to Agricultural and Forestry Workers," dated March 10, 1953. After listing some of the topics to be discussed at the conference, the appeal called on all who read it to set up Sponsoring Committees for the preparation of the World Conference and to call meetings and rallies to "discuss and work out programs of local demands corresponding to the most urgent needs and to the specific possibilities for achieving them." It urged the agricultural workers to elect delegates in their villages, estates, and places of work, and to collect the necessary funds to cover their traveling expenses. In addition, the peasants were encouraged to "strengthen organizations, set up new trade union branches, recruit new members, and form Small Peasants Associations." Persons requesting additional material on the preparation of the conference were urged to write to the Trade Union International of Agricultural and Forestry Workers, 19 Via Boncompagni, Rome, Italy.

3. Participation

The WFTU claims that the Conference of Agricultural and Forestry Workers was attended by 200 delegates and observers from 146 organizations and 61 countries of Latin America, Asia, the Near and Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Those representatives allegedly spoke for more than 22,000,000 workers--foresters, peasants, migratory agricultural labor, plantation hands, and small landholders.

During the conference it was announced that 10 agricultural workers' organizations had joined the TUI--those of Ceylon,

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Indonesia, Jamaica, British Guiana, Guatemala, Argentina, and the Gold Coast. More significant, however, is the claim made by Pravda that "122 delegates and observers representing organizations not embodied in the International Alliance of Agricultural and Forestry Workers" were present at the conference.

There is some evidence that, as a result of their attendance at the conference, several of these non-Communist delegates were convinced that there were benefits to be derived from linking their organizations to the WFTU. It has been reported by a reliable source that when the conference ended a few of the delegates from India, who are non-Communist and influential among the peasantry, pledged the affiliation of their unions to the TUI. These persons, who were brought to the conference at WFTU expense, saw in the efforts of the TUI of Agricultural and Forestry Workers to "assist" the peasants of the "colonial and semicolonial" countries a parallel to their own struggle to improve the living standards of the Indian peasants. The need for immediate and effective aid for their countrymen is so great that it makes these Indian representatives consider the threat of Communist domination or manipulation to be extremely remote.

Despite the WFTU's claims that this was a representative conference, open to all who wished to participate, both Communist and non-Communist, the meeting was more carefully controlled and limited in participants than was the Third World Trade Union Congress. In recent months, the Communists have followed the practice of inviting members of the non-Communist press to their international meetings. A definite effort was made to encourage the non-Communist press to send reporters to the Third WFTU Congress, and every meeting listed on the agenda was open to the press. This was not the case at the Agricultural and Forestry Workers Conference, from which non-Communist newsmen were barred. In addition, special security measures were taken at the meeting site in the Schwechater Hof, located in the British Sector of Vienna. Fifteen engineers and laborers from a local electric company, carpenters, and other workmen spent 8 days decorating the hall and installing special security equipment. All doors and windows in the vicinity of the conference room were locked and covered with soundproof material. All scraps of paper, notes, and other waste was collected by special personnel after each meeting. Guards were posted around the meeting hall to prevent unauthorized persons from entering, both during the meetings and while the hall was empty.

4. Agenda

The agenda for the conference was decided upon at the WFTU Executive Bureau meeting held in February 1953, and was printed and distributed in its final form in March 1953. It contained the following points:

- I. Report on The Present Situation of the Agricultural and Forestry Workers and the Struggle for their Economic and Social Demands.
(Reporter: Ilio BOSI--Italy)

Speech on the Economic Situation of Plantation Workers.
(Reporters: HUTOMO--Indonesia; M'BILLA--Cameroons)
- II. The Strengthening of Aid to the Farm Laborers in the Struggle for their Interests.
(Reporters: Renato VIDIMARI--Italy)

Speech on the Organization of Latin American Farm Workers.
(Reporter: Luis RAMOS--Guatemala)
- III. The Importance of Organization and Tactics in the Struggle of the Agricultural and Forestry Workers.
(Reporter: Maurice CARROUE--France)
- IV. Election of the Executive Bodies of the TUI.

5. Resolutions: Projected Lines of Action

During the conference, five committees were elected to discuss and work out resolutions. Generally, these resolutions followed the same pattern as the resolutions of the Third World Trade Union Congress on the development of trade unions in colonial and semicolonial countries, and on the general tasks of the WFTU in the "unity" campaign.

There is one resolution, however, which merits detailed elaboration. This is the "Resolution on the Problems of Organization" of agricultural workers, forestry workers, and peasants. The important points contained in this resolution will be discussed below and in a form which parallels the

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original document published by the TUI of Agricultural and Forestry Workers:

a. The Importance of Organization

The WFTU has decreed that the main role of the trade union organization is to "unite the workers," to enable them to draw up their demands and coordinate action to achieve them, to enable the peasants to fight for fair prices for their crops, to find markets for them, and to possess their own land, to educate the workers, and train new and militant leadership to ensure the permanency and continuity of the organization, and to ensure that the workers are represented at all congresses, conferences, and similar gatherings.

b. Organizational Methods and Principles

Here, the TUI of Agricultural and Forestry Workers warns its members that in order to achieve the best effect, the following points must be kept in mind:

- (1) Agricultural and peasants' organizations must be "mass organizations, aiming at the inclusion of the majority if not all of the workers."
- (2) Special organizational and propaganda steps must be taken in order to attract women and young workers into the group.
- (3) "The organization and functioning of the trade unions and other organizations must be based on democratic principles of organization and leadership." Regular conferences must be held by the union, and the leadership must be elected; "leadership should be collective but the leaders should have individual responsibility."
- (4) "The trade unions must be so organized as to be closely linked with the life of the workers. This demands organization on a trade basis (trade unions of horticultural workers, lumberjacks, clerical workers in agriculture), on the basis of the agricultural enterprises, the plantations, settlements, villages, with, if necessary, trade union branches in the enterprises or sections."

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- (5) The trade unions are to be absolutely "independent of the employers, governments, and political parties." However, independence from political parties is not to be interpreted to mean that the unions are to ignore or avoid political problems. This means, of course, that the trade unions should create the impression of being "independent" and conceal their Communist ties.
- (6) The TUI points out that the trade union organization must pay serious attention to financial problems, and in addition to income from ordinary trade union dues, must seek income from other sources such as "collections in cash and kind at harvest time," and by cultural and social activities.
- (7) "The Conference stresses that leadership of trade union and peasant organizations in certain countries by active workers not in agriculture can be only transitory and temporary, corresponding to the first period of trade union formation. Policy must be directed with determination toward finding, training, and promoting leaders who come from the agricultural workers."

c. Organization of United Action

The conference called on "all militant workers to use every means to organize and develop unity of action so as to unite all the workers, irrespective of the trade union to which they belong, in the struggle for their demands."

"Unity must be organized from below, on the job, and, if possible, at local, district, provincial, regional, and national levels."

Proposals must have "definite, limited, concrete objectives, with clear demands corresponding to the needs of all the workers and able to draw them into the common fight, i.e., demands for wage increases, better working conditions, some piece of social legislation."

"Proposals for unity must be made publicly, so that the workers can realize who are for and who are against their interests."

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"Proposals for united action must be made not only to the leadership but above all to the rank and file. The workers should be called upon to take into their hands the cause of unity and elect their united action committees from below, to control and guide joint activities so as to prevent separate negotiations and the betrayal of the workers' interests by agents of the employers or government inside the trade unions."

"Proposals for united action must be free from sectarianism."

The parallel with the general WFTU organizational line is clear.

d. Organizational Forms

Because of the varied conditions of agricultural and forestry work, "organizational forms cannot be of a rigid, uniform, and unchangeable character."

- (1) The main organizational effort is to be directed toward the wage earners, whatever the type of work (i.e., farm laborers, clerical workers in agriculture, plantation and forestry workers). Special categories such as migrant workers and workers employed partially in agriculture and partially in other trades (such as sugar refinery workers or seasonal laborers) should have organizational forms peculiar to their local situation.

"Agricultural wage earners' trade unions must be independent, or at least their administration and leadership must be independent, of the peasant organizations."

- (2) "The sharecropping agricultural workers of various types (those who receive a share of the harvest as payment but who are not independent of the owner) can be organized in sharecroppers' trade unions and belong to a national center and through this to the WFTU."

- (3) The organization of the peasants presents a special problem. There are many conditions and a variety of problems, most of which are merely local phenomena. "It is necessary to find the best temporary or permanent organizational forms--trade unions, peasant

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unions, leagues, various kinds of united action committees, cooperatives, etc." The conference, however, recommends "that the peasant organizations should take measures to preserve the class character of their movement"

"In view of the need to ensure the alliance of agricultural and industrial workers, channels of contact should be established in every country by agreement between their organizations."

- (4) Trade unions must be organized in district, regional, provincial, and national federations. Those not affiliated to the TUI are asked to join, either directly or through a national federation. "In countries where trade union organizations are illegal, the agricultural workers should make use of all possibilities, (friendly societies, cultural and sporting associations, etc.) so as to meet and defend their rights. Supporters of the WFTU should also work within government and 'company' trade union organizations to see that the interests of the workers are defended and fight for the democratization of these organizations."

e. Ways and Means of Organization

The Conference appealed to all the National Centers and industrial workers' organizations to help in setting up agricultural workers' organizations in countries where they do not exist and to strengthen them wherever they are weak.

The conference urged the organizations to supervise the training and development of trade unionists by organizing various kinds of schools, courses, classes, lectures, etc. on trade unionism and by publishing special material.

The conference stressed "the importance of the trade union press, the organization of its distribution, a whole network of distribution with reading groups in the countries where illiteracy exists; it urges the publication of bulletins, the workers' own local newspapers, posters, etc." It urged the TUI to publish pamphlets on the most urgent questions: "agrarian reform, work on the plantations, social security, etc."

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The conference stressed "the importance of organizing national and regional conferences and congresses, as a means of study, allowing the detailed working out of programs of demand, methods of organization, and means of action."

6. Results of the Program

In the months following the Agricultural and Forestry Workers Conference, there has been an increase in the activities of Communist Parties and labor unions in the agricultural field:

In November 1953, at a meeting of officials of the Argentine Movimiento Obrero Comunista, the possibility of publishing an agricultural magazine was discussed.

In December 1953, it was reported that Communist influence among Sudanese farmers had increased considerably in recent months. Local Communists, operating principally through the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation, a WFTU affiliate, were reported to be carrying on an intensive campaign to establish a "cultivators'," or peasants, bloc which would parallel and work with the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation. Efforts were directed at breaking the hold of the Gezira Tenants Association, a non-Communist peasants' group, over the local farmers. According to this report, a defection of 25 of the 50 elected members of the Tenants Association to the Communist-led group had already occurred--necessitating new elections in the Tenants Association in the near future and raising the possibility that the Tenants Association would be completely taken over by the Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation.

At the Third Congress of the Communist Party of India, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the organization of agricultural labor, with the warning that agricultural workers must be organized separately from the peasants--a warning which had been expressed earlier in the "Resolution on Organization of the Agricultural and Forestry Conference."

In Italy, the agricultural unions affiliated to the CGIL are sponsoring a project which will produce a history of the labor movement in agriculture--the first such history to be written.

In February 1954, a reliable source reported that the Chilean Communist Party, having become concerned over its

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lack of influence in labor in the rural areas, planned to increase its propaganda directed toward rural workers.

7. Administrative Changes Made at the Conference

The fourth item on the agenda of the Agricultural and Forestry Conference was the election of new officers and the executive bodies of the TUI. In September, prior to the conference, it was revealed that the TUI planned to increase the number of officers who would be permanently employed at the TUI Secretariat, located in Rome, Italy, at 19 Via Boncampagni. At this time Ruslan Widjajasastra, Indonesian delegate to the Third World Trade Union Congress, wrote to the Central Bureau of SOBSI (the Indonesian trade union federation affiliated to the WFTU) informing it that a special secretary in charge of Asian affairs was to be appointed and that the special secretary would work at the headquarters in Rome. The new secretary, it had been decided, was to be an Indonesian with a mastery of either French or English. In addition, the candidate was to possess a "comprehensive knowledge of the peasantry." In view of this decision, it is not surprising to find an Indonesian, Tjugito, listed as the new President of the TUI of Agricultural and Forestry Workers. Other officers elected during the conference are: General Secretary--Illo Bosi of Italy; Vice Presidents--Maurice Carroue of France, Sun Tchuan of China, S.V. Yegurazdov of the U.S.S.R., M'Billa of the Cameroons, and an as yet unnamed representative of Guatemala.

C. Conclusions

The importance of the Agricultural and Forestry Workers Conference, attended by less than 200 trade union representatives, is indicated by the information outlined in the preceding sections. Only the Third World Trade Union Congress, which preceded it, outranks it in importance within the international Communist labor movement. It was, in fact, planned as an integral part of the Third World Trade Union Congress in order to put into effect the "line" laid down at that meeting concerning the extension of the Communist trade union movement to the "colonial and semicolonial" areas of the world--Southeast Asia, Africa, the Near and Middle East, and Latin America. In these areas, where approximately three-fourths of the population is engaged in agricultural pursuits, the influence of Communism can be extended only by a program which appears to answer the needs of the peasant, the plantation workers, the farm laborer, and the small landowner. Organization of agricultural and forestry workers and of peasant movements under the WFTU banner thus serves to broaden the Communist labor "base" and strengthen the international labor "front."

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